examined in the Ministry of Railways in 1997. The project was found operationally feasible but State Government of Andhra Pradesh did not give consent to bear their share of cost and the project could not take off.

Indian Railways is, however, ready to undertake the project if the State Government bears the investment required.

Computerised ticket booking facilities at Silchar and Badarpur

2254. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any proposal to provide computerised ticket booking facilities for rail journeys from Silchar and Badarpur;

(b) if so, the details thereof and by when the facility is likely to be introduced; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI O. RAJAGOPAL): (a) to (c) Computerised ticket booking facilities is already available at Silchar. However, these facilities are not available at Badarpur at present.

Computerised reservation facilities are capital intensive and also involve significant recurring costs. These are provided at railway stations registering a large number of reservation related transactions. The reservation workload available at Badarpur railway station is not high enough to qualify for provision of these facilities at present.

Genetically engineered rice

2255. PROF. A. LAKSHMISAGAR: Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to develop and introduce genetically engineered rice (Golden Rice) when other countries and international organisations are against the entry of genetically modified foods; and

(b) if so, what are the reasons for opting for genetically modified

rice when introduction of genetically modified food is opposed by several countries and by experts?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT): (a) and (b) The Department of Biotechnology in collaboration with Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is working at present on a Joint Research proposal on Golden Rice under the second phase of Indo-Swiss Collaboration in Biotechnology. In spite of resistance to genetically modified crops by some countries, genetically engineered crops have been cultivated in about 46.9 million hectares during the year 2000 all over the world. Developing countries like Argentina, China, South Africa, Romania, Mexico, Bulgaria, Portugal, Ukraine and Uruguay have almost 11 million hectares under transgenic crop cultivation. Public concerns regarding the safety of environment and consumers are addressed globally through stringent national regulatory frameworks.

Recent National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB) repeat survey has indicated the prevalence of deficiency of vitamin-A in 0.7% of pre-school children. Accordingly, it is estimated that about 12 million people may be suffering from vitamin-A deficiency. Traditional breeding methods have been unsuccessful in producing crops containing high vitamin-A content. Further, existing vitamin-A supplementation programmes are expensive and complicated. Development of vitamin-A rich rice varieties to address nutritional requirements is one of the sustainable solutions, taking note of all bio-safety requirements. This rice would be introduced only after successfully completing all trials following the national regulations.

International Conference on reforms in Biotechnology

2256. SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD: Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that an International Conference was organised recently in Delhi for imposing effectively regulatory reforms, in view of the rapid development of Biotechnology;

(b) if so, the decisions taken or measures proposed for